

Franco-Scottish Efforts at Monastic Reform 1500-1560

REV. MARK DILWORTH, M.A., Ph.D., F.R.Hist.S.

The half-century preceding the Reformation Parliament of 1560 was a time of unrest. It included the national disaster of Flodden in 1513 and the English invasions of the 1520s and 1540s. Two royal minorities added to the instability and lawlessness. The Scottish Church suffered from the faults endemic in the late middle ages, which were compounded in the years after 1513 by ambitious churchmen vying for the prestigious positions made vacant by death on Flodden field. Monasteries had the additional affliction of unsuitable superiors imposed on them by an agreement between the Papacy and the Scottish crown. These either took the habit and became monks technically if not in spirit, or they remained secular (that is, non-monastic) clerics and ruled as commendators. In most monasteries, too, the monks had settled for a second-best as regards common life through the system of portions, which in practice meant individual private incomes.

It goes almost without saying that all was not well in Scottish monasteries during this period. Much has been written on their far from perfect state and on particular unedifying episodes, and less on efforts to improve matters. Monasteries had a twofold constitutional arrangement for safeguarding observance and discipline: general chapters and visitations. Both were originally Cistercian practices but had been extended to all monastic groups. General chapters were meetings of abbots, including also independent priors, at regular intervals for mutual support and to meet any needs which had arisen. Visitations were investigations on the spot by someone empowered, very often by general chapters, to correct what was amiss.

A distinction has to be made between monks, strictly so called, and canons regular. In sixteenth-century Scotland, however, this was very largely theoretical rather than practical. Canons regular were priests living a monastic life; monks by definition led a monastic life but were also ordained to the priesthood. Apart from service by some canons in

parishes distant from the monastery, the life-style of monks and canons regular was very similar.

Far more important was the distinction between the centralised and uncentralised groups. The ordinary black Benedictine monks and black Augustinian canons were not centralised, although the fourth Lateran Council in 1215 had decreed that in each region the Benedictine and the Augustinian abbots were to meet regularly in a general chapter. In Scotland after the early fifteenth century, there is no evidence of a general chapter of either grouping taking place; and if there was no general chapter, there was no visitation commissioned by it. In such a situation, visitation devolved on the local bishop, and if a monastery had the privilege of exemption from the bishop's authority, it devolved on Rome. The archbishop of St Andrews, if he had the powers (as some had) of a legate *a latere*, could carry out visitations even of exempt monasteries.

As for the centralised groupings represented in Scotland (Cluniacs, Tironensians, Cistercians, Carthusians, Valliscaulians and Premonstratensian Canons), the original mother-house of all six was in France. Regular general chapters were held in each and indeed, at the turn of the century in 1500, all were making consistent efforts at reform. The effect of these efforts in Scotland was very different in each of the six groupings.

To take the Tironensians first, the effect was non-existent. The evidence is conclusive that long before 1500 the four so-called Tironensian abbeys (Kelso, Arbroath, Kilwinning, Lindores) had no longer any connection with Tiron. It was the logical and inevitable result of Kelso's exemption from the authority of Tiron in 1165.¹ They were in reality uncentralised black Benedictines. At Tiron in the late fifteenth century, reforming general chapters were being held and visitations were being conducted by the abbot of Tiron,² but this reforming activity had no relevance for Scotland.

¹ *Liber S. Marie de Calchou* (Bannatyne Club, 1846), p. ix, nos. 447, 461, 467.

² P. Schmitz, *Histoire de l'Ordre de Saint-Benoit* (Maredsous, 1948-56), iii, 205-9.

The very opposite was the case with the Carthusians. Their priors met annually at general chapter at the Grande Chartreuse, though the prior of the Perth charterhouse was not obliged to attend except in leap years. Chapter kept strict control of its houses everywhere, sending "visitors" to carry out visitations, appointing priors and deposing them.³ Strictly speaking, efforts at reform were not being made, because the tight discipline had prevented reform becoming necessary; the order claimed that it was *numquam reformatus quia numquam deformatus*. In 1535 James V protested when a prior of Perth was deposed.⁴ As will be seen, the crown often intervened in matters of monastic discipline and reform.

In the other four groupings, the effect of reforming efforts was in between these two extremes. The earliest grouping, the Cluniacs, had been unique in the absolute power given to the abbot of Cluny. All new Cluniac houses – that is, founded within the order or not already abbeys when they opted to accept the Cluniac reform – were priories dependent on Cluny and enjoying no autonomy.⁵ It was thus a complete reversal of normal procedure when in 1219 the monks of Paisley received papal permission to elect an abbot. The situation was regularised in 1241: the community at Paisley was to elect an abbot, who was then to go to Cluny within two years to take an oath of obedience to the abbot of Cluny. Paisley was to accept visitations from Cluny and pay a small tax annually. Crossraguel, founded from Paisley, likewise became an abbey but was required to accept visitations from Paisley as its mother-house. In fact, the relationship of Crossraguel to Paisley was very like that of Paisley to Cluny.⁶ It is remarkable that the only two Scottish Cluniac houses were both

³ W.N.M. Beckett, "The Perth Charterhouse before 1500", *Analecta Cartusiana*, 128 (1988), 51-66.

⁴ *The Letters of James V*, edd. R.K. Hannay and D. Hay (Edinburgh, 1954) [hereafter *James V Letters*], 300.

⁵ D. Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England* (Cambridge, 1940), 145-50; D. Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England* (Cambridge, 1948-59), ii, 157-8.

⁶ I.B. Cowan and D.E. Easson, *Medieval Religious Houses Scotland*, 2nd edn. (London, 1976) [hereafter *MRHS*], 63-5; *Charters and Records of the Ancient Abbey of Cluni*, ed. G.F. Duckett (1888), ii, 113-16.

abbseys, for only twelve abbots attended the general chapter of the very large order of Cluny.⁷ Every Cluniac house in England was a dependent priory, a situation which caused great difficulty during the Great Schism and the wars between England and France and eventually brought about the exemption of the English houses from Cluny in 1480.⁸

There is some evidence of links between Scotland and Cluny in the fifteenth century. In 1418 the abbot of Cluny stepped in and appointed an abbot at Paisley.⁹ In 1447-8 Paisley monks travelled to Cluny because of matters affecting the two monasteries. The abbot of Paisley was still paying tax to Cluny, although he claimed he was only bound to attend general chapter every seven years. In the later 1450s there was discussion of a visitation of the Cluniac houses in England, Scotland and Ireland but no evidence that this was carried out in Scotland.¹⁰

Cluniac monasteries in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries continued to enjoy the privilege of exemption from the local bishop's authority. In 1487 the bishop of Glasgow formally acknowledged the exemption of Paisley and Crossraguel from his authority, and in 1490 Paisley refused to accept a visitation from a diocesan official. This constitutional position held good after 1500. The Glasgow diocesan (now an archbishop) again acknowledged the exemption of Paisley and Crossraguel in 1509, as did Andrew Forman, archbishop of St Andrews, in 1516, although as legate *a latere* he could conduct visitations of exempt monasteries.¹¹

In the sixteenth century there is no record of an abbot of Paisley or Crossraguel attending general chapter at Cluny, and no clear record of

⁷ *Visitations of English Cluniac Foundations*, ed. G.F. Duckett (London, 1890), 9n.

⁸ Knowles, *Religious Orders*, ii, 158-61.

⁹ *Copiale Prioratus Sanctiandree*, ed. J.H. Baxter (Oxford, 1930) [hereafter *St A. Cop.*], 263-5; J.H. Burns, *Scottish Churchmen and the Council of Basle* (Glasgow, 1962), 90.

¹⁰ Duckett, *Cluni Charters*, i, 196-7; ii, 83-5, 159-66, 214-15; *St A. Cop.*, 352-8.

¹¹ *Charters of the Abbey of Crosraguel* (Archeological and Historical Collections relating to Ayrshire and Galloway, 1886) [hereafter *Crossraguel Chrs.*], i, 43-5, 46-8, 64, 65-7.

Paisley receiving a visitation from Cluny, nor of Crossraguel receiving a visitation from either Paisley or Cluny. It seems likely, however, that visitations did occur. Firstly, the acknowledgement of the exemption of the Scottish abbeys by the two Scottish archbishops was presumably made because visitations were in fact taking place. Secondly, at a time when Cluny was making efforts at reform,¹² relations between Cluny and Scotland continued.

The Cluny general chapter of 1492 gave formal leave to the abbot of Paisley to distribute a pittance to his monks, under fairly stringent conditions.¹³ In 1520 the abbot of Paisley, in his capacity of vicar of Cluny, refused to confirm the election of William Kennedy as abbot of Crossraguel. No doubt confirmation would have been ultra vires, for Kennedy at the time was not a Cluniac monk. Then in 1548 John Hamilton, bishop of Dunkeld and abbot of Paisley, acting as "Father Abbot of the Order of Cluny in Scotland" gave a mandate for Quintin Kennedy to receive the abbatial blessing as abbot of Crossraguel.¹⁴ Given these formal relationships, it seems probable that visitations were made from Cluny but the record of them has not survived.

The remaining three groups, Cistercians, Valliscaulians and Premonstratensians, had much in common, for the Valliscaulian Rule was based in part on that of the Cistercians, while Premonstratensians despite being canons were modelled on the Cistercians. To take the Valliscaulians first, only two documents relevant to our purpose here seem to have survived. Both are of 1506 and addressed to the prior of Beauly by the head of the order, the prior of Val des Choux (the adjective "Valliscaulian" being taken from the Latin name of Val des Choux). The two are also somewhat contradictory.¹⁵

The first, of May 1506, commissioned the prior of Beauly to carry out a visitation of Ardchattan, described as immediately subject to Val des Choux. He was to correct any abuses and see to the election of a

¹² Schmitz, *Histoire*, 205-7, 213.

¹³ National Library of Scotland [hereafter NLS], Adv.29.4.2 (ii), fo. 63.

¹⁴ *Crossraguel Chrs.*, i, 68; *The Scots Peerage*, ed. J.B. Paul (Edinburgh, 1904-14), ii, 466; Scottish Record Office, NP1/13, fo. 6.

¹⁵ *The Charters of the Priory of Beauly*, ed. E.C. Batten (Grampian Club, 1877), 140-2, 157-62; NLS, MS 2101, fos. 260v, 267v-269v.

new superior and install him. The latter is not termed a prior, nor is Ardchattan called a priory. A clause in the document safeguards the rights of Rome to provide and of Val des Choux to confirm an election.

The second is dated December and we have to construct events from its content. The bishop of Ross and the diocesan *Officialis* were proposing to carry out a visitation of Beauly priory. The prior and convent therefore sent a secular priest, William Tomson, with a letter to the prior of Val des Choux dated 10 November 1506 but not signed or sealed, stating that they did not want to accept the visitation or pay the usual *jura et procurationes* (dues and expenses), because Valliscaulian monasteries were exempt from episcopal authority. The prior of Beauly wanted copies of documents showing Valliscaulian exemption.

The letter, having stated all this, then said simply and forcefully: *Quod non est verum* – That is not so, you are quite wrong! In France there are only 13 small houses of the order, in five dioceses, which are visited each year by the bishop or his commissioners, who receive their dues and expenses. (The Scottish monasteries were in fact the only Valliscaulian houses outwith France.)

There followed a knock-out blow: We are astounded – *non valamus satis mirari* – at how you come to be superior at Beauly without our confirmation, for you have never come here to get it or asked for it. We summon you under the penalties in force to attend general chapter next year. Your predecessor in office promised to come every four years and we allowed him to make it every six years. The letter added, in a sort of postscript: Your predecessor promised to send the fish called Salmon, but it never came. We should probably view this as a form of tax or tribute rather than an exotic gift.

It seems clear from the two documents that Val des Choux was in a reforming frame of mind and trying to influence Scotland, but there are two problems. Firstly, why get the Beauly prior to conduct a visitation of Ardchattan and yet want the bishop to do this at Beauly? Did Valliscaulians carry out visitations themselves or not? A possible solution would be that Val des Choux considered Ardchattan to be a dependency of Beauly, and indeed the first letter avoids using the terms

“prior” and “priory” for Ardchattan, while the second letter speaks of Beauly and its dependencies. On the other hand, the first letter describes Ardchattan as immediately subject to Val des Choux, not to Beauly.

A second problem concerns Beauly itself: was it Valliscaulian or Cistercian? A papal bull of 1497/8 refers to Beauly as belonging to the Cistercian and to the Valliscaulian order and speaks of the legal rights of both. The man provided by this bull took his oath of fidelity to the holy see as prior of Beauly *ordinis Cisterciensis sub regula Valliscaulium* (of the Cistercian order, observing the rule of Val des Choux).¹⁶ Clearly, at that early date, Beauly was already in the Cistercian sphere of influence. Its integration with the Cistercian abbey of Kinloss in the 1530s and 1540s under Abbot Robert Reid was long foreshadowed but was never total, for Ferrerio refers to monks of Beauly wearing the Cistercian habit while studying at Kinloss but differing as to profession of vows.¹⁷ There is no evidence for further links of the little west-Highland monastery of Ardchattan, the only other Scottish house originating from Val des Choux, with either Valliscaulians or Cistercians.

Although Premonstratensians held a general chapter annually, complete acts of chapter are extant only from 1498.¹⁸ There were contacts between Scotland and the mother-house at Prémontre during the fifteenth century and in 1466 the prior of Dryburgh was made visitor for Scotland, an appointment said to have been simoniacal. Premonstratensians had a constitutional feature shared by no other order, the regional *circaria* (circary or circuit), for which general chapter appointed a visitor. This was in addition to the general chapter at Prémontre. They also had the Cistercian arrangement of “filiation”, which meant that a mother-house had various rights, including that of visitation, in the daughter-houses it had founded, although it was not

¹⁶ Batten, *Beauly Charters*, 106-9, 111; NLS, MS 2101, fos. 261-264v, 241v.

¹⁷ *Ferrerii Historia Abbatum de Kynlos* (Bannatyne Club, 1839) [hereafter Ferrerius, *Historia*], 40, 48-9, 52. Cf. MRIHS, 80, 84.

¹⁸ N. Backmund, *Monasticon Praemonstratense* (Straubing, 1949-56), ii, 92-116; N. Backmund, “The Premonstratensian Order in Scotland”, *Innes Review* iv (1953), 25-41. Other references are supplementary.

as clear-cut as with the Cistercians. Not surprisingly, since visitations could be carried out by the abbot of Prémontré and by the visitor within the circuit as well as by the abbot of the mother-house, Premonstratensians were exempt from visitation by the bishop.¹⁹

By 1498 the Scottish circuit was in being, comprising five houses: Dryburgh and the four in the south-west (Whithorn, Soulseat, Holywood and Tongland). Fearn in the eastern Highlands was not included. All were abbeys apart from Whithorn, a cathedral priory. In 1500 the prior of Whithorn was the commissary of the abbot of Prémontré²⁰ and in 1502-5 the visitor for Scotland was the abbot of Prémontré himself. At this time, in 1503, general chapter was trying to get the annual dues from the Scottish and English houses.

The general chapter of 1505 took an important initiative. On its agenda were reform and new statutes. According to Norbert Backmund, the Premonstratensian historian, all the Scottish abbots were summoned – normally only the visitor had to attend – but only the abbot of Soulseat was present, sent by James IV at the request of the abbot-general. The others were censured for absenting themselves, and the abbot of Soulseat was appointed visitor for Scotland. It has to be said that there are discrepancies, or at least difficulties in reconciling Backmund's account, based largely on the acts of general chapter, with what is known from Scottish sources.

A letter of James IV, in April 1505, asked general chapter to appoint the prior of Whithorn visitor for Scotland. The chapter of 1506 ratified an agreement between the Whithorn prior and the Soulseat abbot, whereby the former was to be visitor but with authority to delegate the abbot of Soulseat to act for him. In 1507 James again wrote to Prémontré, this time declaring that the prior of Whithorn had extorted the royal letter in his favour and that the head of the order in Scotland should be the abbot of Dryburgh. The archbishop of St Andrews also wrote to Prémontré complaining that

¹⁹ Knowles, *Religious Orders*, ii, 138-41; H.M. Colvin, *The White Canons in England* (Oxford, 1951), 17, 24.

²⁰ *Wigtownshire Charters*, ed. R.C. Reid (Scottish History Society [hereafter SHS], 1960) [hereafter Wigt. Chrs.], 105.

the prior of Whithorn had been acting harshly and exercising authority in the province of St Andrews, and therefore the abbot of Dryburgh should be given the position of authority or at least exempted from the prior of Whithorn's authority.²¹ It would certainly see that the prior had been conducting visitations or enforcing discipline in some way.

Despite these protests from Scotland the arrangement of the two visitors acting jointly continued until 1515. In 1512 the English houses severed their connection with Prémontré, as the English Cluniacs had done with their mother-house.²² According to Backmund, the Scots were on the brink of doing the same but the link endured through the resolution of the abbot of Holywood. Then, again according to Backmund, the prior of Whithorn was sole visitor from 1515 to 1523. This raises great difficulties. Quintin Vaus continued as abbot of Soulseat until 1525,²³ whereas at Whithorn Henry McDowell ceased to be prior not long after September 1514 and there followed a lengthy dispute over the succession.²⁴ From the autumn of 1516 there were various rival claimants, of whom all from 1518 to 1524 were to be commendators, that is, not canons regular.²⁵ General chapter could not, and would not want to, appoint such men visitors. Either Backmund is mistaken or general chapter was totally ignorant of affairs in Scotland and remained so for years. It is perhaps worth saying that the difficulty would vanish if it was the other co-visitor, the abbot of Soulseat, who remained in office.

In 1523 general chapter appointed the abbot of Holywood visitor. Backmund says this was James Welsh, promoted to the position in gratitude for his keeping the Scottish abbots faithful to Prémontré in 1512. We know, however, from a Scottish source that it was another

²¹ *The Letters of James the Fourth 1505-13*, ed. R.K. Hannay and R.L. Mackie (SHS, 1953) [hereafter *James IV Letters*], nos.2, 107-8.

²² Knowles, *Religious Orders*, ii, 141; *Letters from the English Abbots to the Chapter at Citeaux 1442-1521*, ed. C.H. Talbot (London, 1967), 251.

²³ *Wigt. Chrs.*, 93-4, 107; *James V Letters*, 109.

²⁴ For priors at Whithorn see M. Dilworth, *Whithorn Priory in the Late Middle Ages* (Whithorn, 1994), 5-7.

²⁵ For commendators see M. Dilworth, "The Commendator System in Scotland", *Innes Review*, 37 (1986), 51-72.

man, for the abbot of Prémontré wrote to James Stewart, abbot of Dryburgh, appointing him visitor in place of the abbot of Holywood, who after being made visitor had become a Cistercian abbot. This was clearly John Maxwell, abbot of Holywood, who in 1523 was transferred to Cistercian Dundrennan to be its abbot.²⁶

Stewart acted as superior in Scotland for a time but was scarcely a shining light, and James V later accused him of trying to hand over Dryburgh to his illegitimate son.²⁷ In 1523-5 the Crown filled the vacancies at Holywood and Whithorn with commendators, who were *ipso facto* ineligible to become visitor.²⁸ General chapter in 1532 then made David Vaus, abbot of Soulseat, visitor for three years. Appointed in April, Vaus appealed to the King for help, saying he feared opposition from the other abbots, and a royal letter commanding obedience to him was issued in July. By 18 September he was dead, to be replaced at Soulseat by a commendator.²⁹

Vaus' fears were surely justified. A commendator ruled in Holywood, the unsatisfactory James Stewart held Dryburgh, Tongland was in the hands of the bishop of Galloway.³⁰ Only one possibility remained. At Whithorn in 1525 Ninian Fleming, then aged 15, had been appointed commendator for life; in 1532, aged 22, he voluntarily took the habit and found himself in trouble for doing so, as it was against his terms of appointment.³¹ Having overcome this difficulty, he was in 1534 made visitor for a year by general chapter. One wonders if that was why Fleming decided to become a canon and thus be a regular superior, eligible to be the visitor.

This is the last mention of Scotland in the acts of chapter. The efforts of general chapter to maintain or reform observance in the

²⁶ *St Andrews Formulare 1514-46*, ed. G. Donaldson and C. Macrae (Stair Society, 1942-4) [hereafter *St A. Form.*], i, 316-19; *James V Letters*, 94-5, 109.

²⁷ *St A. Form.*, i, 319-21; *James V Letters*, 286.

²⁸ *James V Letters*, 95.

²⁹ *Registrum Secreti Sigilli Regum Scotorum*, ii, 1349; *James V Letters*, 231; *Wigt. Chrs.*, 94-5, 108-9.

³⁰ *James V Letters*, 162; W.M. Brady, *The Episcopal Succession in England, Scotland and Ireland 1400-1875* (Rome, 1876-7), i, 209-10.

³¹ Dilworth, *Whithorn Priory*, 7; *James V Letters*, 246-7, 362-3.

Scottish circuit had come to an end. Certainly circumstances had been unfortunate in 1532 when the abbot appointed died within months. The major blame, however, must lie with the Scottish crown for its nomination of unsuitable regular abbots and of commendators ineligible to be visitors. The transfer in 1523 of the newly appointed visitor to another order was also the crown's doing.

The king's letter of 1505 gave manifold reasons why Whithorn should have pre-eminence in Scotland. Two years later the king and his illegitimate son, the archbishop of St Andrews, wanted Dryburgh (in the latter's diocese) to rank first. Then in 1517 the crown again accorded primacy to Whithorn.³² A royal letter of 1524 refers to the abbot of Soulseat as father superior of the order in Scotland, at the very time when the abbot of Dryburgh was replacing the abbot of Holywood as visitor. The context, however, was confirmation of an election at Whithorn and most probably the abbot was acting in virtue of the system of filiation, for Soulseat was the mother-house of Whithorn. In 1533 a papal bull, perhaps repeating the language of a royal letter of nomination, termed the abbot of Soulseat "superior and *primus abbas*" of Whithorn, with power to visit, correct and reform Whithorn as his normal duty.³³ This certainly refers to filiation. It would seem that the appointment of a visitor or commissioner within the circuit sat in uneasy relationship with the system of filiation and even less happily with the caprices of the Scottish crown.

Finally, the question should be asked whether these various appointments had any effect and whether visitations were actually carried out. The prior of Whithorn certainly seems to have acted as visitor with some firmness in the years after 1506. Given the system of filiation and the appointment of visitors for the circuit, visitations could well have taken place and been taken for granted, so that record of them has not survived. Caution must be exercised, too, in

³² *James IV Letters*, nos. 2, 107-8; *Vetera Monumenta Hibernorum et Scotorum Historiam Illustrantia*, ed. A. Theiner (Rome, 1864), no.925.

³³ *James V Letters*, 109; *Wigt. Chrs.*, 109.

interpreting the terms of a visitor's general mandate, with its use of traditional formulae, as evidence of current abuses.³⁴

Throughout the fifteenth century the relations of Scottish Cistercians with Cîteaux and its general chapter may have been patchy but they never lapsed. The chapter was held each year, though the Scots abbots were bound to attend only every fourth year. Chapter or its officials appointed visitors and the well defined system of filiation held good. By it the abbot of the mother-house, termed Father Abbot or Father Immediate, had jurisdiction over daughter-houses empowering him, among other things, to preside at abbatial elections, confirm the monk elected in office and conduct visitations. Cistercians were therefore exempted from visitation by the local bishop.³⁵

Chapter quite frequently appointed visitors for Scotland, usually a French abbot. The visit of the abbot of Pontigny commissioned in 1409 is recorded in Scotland, as is the activity of the abbot of Coupar Angus appointed in 1491.³⁶ Of course, chapter wanted payment of the dues from Scottish monasteries and complained when they were not paid.³⁷ As travel from these islands to Cîteaux was difficult, the Scots abbots were enjoined on two occasions to meet together and the decisions of chapter were to be promulgated.³⁸ The Cistercian general chapter fought against commendators foisted on its houses in all the countries where this happened, including Scotland. It took an interest in the dispute involving the Melrose abbacy from 1486 on and an envoy from Cîteaux visited Melrose in 1488.³⁹

The system of filiation also operated within Scotland. The Kinloss abbot presided at and confirmed elections at its two daughter-houses,

³⁴ Cf. *St A. Form.*, i, 319-20; G.G. Coulton, *Scottish Abbeys & Social Life* (Cambridge, 1933), 236.

³⁵ *Statuta Capitulorum Generalium Ordinis Cisterciensis 1116-1786*, ed. J.M. Canivez (Louvain, 1933-41), 1157, no.52 and *passim*; *Wigt. Chrs.*, 46-8.

³⁶ Canivez, *Statuta*, 1409, no.60; 1445, no.53; 1482, no.26; 1489, no.43; 1491, nos.23,33; Ferrerius, *Historia*, 29; *St A. Cop.*, 388; J. Morton, *The Monastic Annals of Teviotdale* (Edinburgh, 1832), 238.

³⁷ Canivez, *Statuta*, 1410, no.8; 1454, no.29; 1487, no.23; 1490, no.35.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1433, no.37; 1439, no.32; 1496, no.45.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1489, no.73; 1492, no.44; 1496, nos.16,17; Talbot, *Letters*, 109-10.

Deer and Culross; he also carried out visitations at Culross and deposed abbots there. We know of these events from the chronicle of Ferrerio, but no doubt the same happened in other houses. Certainly the Melrose abbot confirmed an election at its daughter-house, Newbattle.⁴⁰

At the end of the fifteenth century, the Cîteaux general chapter was engaged in efforts to maintain and reform monastic discipline. Relations with Scotland had been maintained and were to continue after 1500, as did also the system of filiation within Scotland. The point is important, for the well-known visitation of Scottish monasteries by the abbot of Chaalis in 1531 has usually been viewed in isolation instead of being firmly placed within the ongoing ordinary efforts to maintain monastic observance. That particular visitation, for a variety of reasons, has been accorded more importance than it deserves. Firstly, the king was involved and his letters have survived. Secondly, much other documentation has survived, including the matters dealt with by the visitor, which gives it scarcity value. Thirdly, it has not been generally recognised that the visitor's remit included England as well as Scotland. The continuing chapters and visitations after 1500 should therefore be outlined, in order to see the visitation of 1531 and its aftermath in perspective.

General chapter appointed visitors for Scotland in 1510 and 1518 as well as in the 1530s. The definitors (officials appointed by general chapter) also appointed a visitor in 1502. Abbot Thomas Crystal of Kinloss was visitor for Scotland in 1507, perhaps appointed by the definitors, for he is not mentioned in the acts of chapter.⁴¹ General chapter could be strict; for instance, it disciplined Thomas Crystal, who was in fact a reforming abbot, for non-attendance at chapter, until it was explained that the fault lay with his procurators. Nor did it shirk issues. It considered the matter of feus at Newbattle in 1511 and at

⁴⁰ Ferrerius, *Historia*, 29-31, 62; *Calendar of Papal Letters*, vii, 214, 346-7; *St A. Cop.*, 375-6.

⁴¹ Canivez, *Statuta*, 1510, no.46; 1518, nos.29,35; Talbot, *Letters*, 230; Ferrerius, *Historia*, 79-80; *Charters of the Abbey of Coupar Angus*, ed. D.E. Easson (SHS, 1947) [hereafter *C. A. Chrs.*], ii, 275.

Glenluce in 1527.⁴² The Glenluce monks c.1513 elected one of the community as abbot, while the Crown nominated a commendator. Cîteaux confirmed the election of the monk and in 1518 general chapter protested to the Scottish Lords of Council over his ejection.⁴³ As late as 1562, after the Reformation Parliament, chapter supported an abbot of Melrose,⁴⁴ who was surely a monk elected by the community.

In 1506 a Scots monk of Cîteaux, Thomas Fassington, was sent as envoy of Cîteaux to England, Scotland and Ireland. The abbot of Cîteaux sent a letter of commendation for him to James IV in July and Fassington was operating in Scotland by November. A few months later James wanted Robert Beaton, abbot of Glenluce and in process of being transferred to Coupar Angus, to be made abbot of Melrose instead and be appointed vistor in Scotland (presumably in place of Thomas Crystal). He issued a letter commanding obedience to Beaton and Fassington in their visitations.⁴⁵ Fassington was again in Scotland in 1517, when he clashed with Andrew Forman, archbishop of St Andrews, who claimed the right of visitation in Cistercian houses in his diocese.⁴⁶

As for filiation, Abbot Crystal intervened to reform the ceremonial of the choir office – that is what Ferrerio's classical Latin seems to mean – at Deer and Culross. The Melrose abbot disciplined the abbot of its daughter-house at Coupar Angus and in 1524 confirmed an election there. A striking incident is related by Ferrerio: when Kinloss and its daughter-house Deer disputed over teinds, the other abbots met together and settled the matter.⁴⁷ Evidently there was cohesion among Scottish Cistercians.

It is against this background that the visitations and reforming efforts of the 1530s should be seen. They can conveniently be

⁴² Canivez, *Statuta*, 1511, nos.32,59; 1527, no.35.

⁴³ *Wigt. Chrs.*, 44-5; *James V Letters*, 31; Canivez, *Statuta*, 1518, no.84.

⁴⁴ Canivez, *Statuta*, 1562, no.47.

⁴⁵ *James IV Letters*, nos.40,93-4; RSS, i, 1363, 2833. Cf. *Essays on the Scottish Reformation*, ed. D. McRoberts (Glasgow, 1962), 214.

⁴⁶ *St A. Form.*, i 56; Talbot, *Letters*, 233-4, 245-7.

⁴⁷ Ferrerius, *Historia*, 69, 79; C. A. Chrs., ii, 275.

described in three phases. Andrew Durie, provided as abbot of Melrose in the later 1520s, was a nephew of his predecessor, Robert Beaton.⁴⁸ He had been made visitor for Scotland, but the general chapter of 1530 deposed him for negligence and in his place appointed Walter Malin, abbot of Glenluce, who was at the chapter. Thus began the first phase of the visitations. Aware of the difficulties he faced, Malin in September 1530 obtained papal confirmation of his appointment together with comprehensive powers, and in January 1531 Pope Clement VII wrote to James V in his favour.⁴⁹ Malin acted with energy and confronted Andrew Durie. That same month, January 1531, the Lords of Council were brought into the dispute as Durie and Malin made counter claims. They granted an officer of arms to go with Malin on his visitations but also, at the instance of the archbishop of St Andrews (James Beaton, Durie's uncle), forbade Malin to carry out visitations of the nunneries in the latter's diocese. At that very time, the king asked the abbot of Cîteaux and general chapter to send a visitor, that is, a replacement for Malin.⁵⁰

The second phase began when the chapter of 1531 appointed Simon Postel, abbot of Chaalis, as visitor of Scotland and England. He obtained a recommendation from the French king to James and in September was in Scotland and being received by the king.⁵¹ He wrote that month to Deer from Coupar Angus, just north of Tay, which was the furthest north he reached, for his time was limited. What he wrote was not acts of visitation, since he never went to Deer, but comprehensive directives for strict monastic observance.⁵² He apparently then departed from Scotland, having visited perhaps only

⁴⁸ For the Beaton-Durie kinship see Macfarlane, *Genealogical Collections* (SHS, 1900), i, 5-9, 23.

⁴⁹ Canivez, *Statuta*, 1530, B and nos.67-8; *Wigt. Chrs.*, 65.

⁵⁰ *Acts of the Lords of Council in Public Affairs* (Edinburgh, 1932), 347-8,360; *James V Letters*, 187.

⁵¹ Canivez, *Statuta*, 1531, nos.13, 49, 50, 53, 62; *James V Letters*, 202.

⁵² Text in *Aberdeen-Banff Illustrations* (Spalding Club, 1847-69), iv, 5-14; translation in *Transactions of the Aberdeen Ecclesiastical Society*, 10 (1897), 171-9.

five of the ten Cistercian houses. We do not know if he went to the three abbeys in the south-west.

In February 1532 James wrote to Cîteaux that the French visitor had gone too far: he had tried to abolish ancient customs, had imposed censures and then departed. The king wanted the abbots of Melrose and Newbattle to be empowered to lift the censures. Durie was summoned to appear at the general chapter of 1533 but in March of that year James wrote to Cîteaux that he could not be spared. The chapter, when it met, confirmed the enactments of the abbot of Chaalis in Scotland and England and appointed Abbots Walter Malin (Glenluce) and Donald Campbell (Coupar Angus) visitors in Scotland for five years.⁵³

The third phase had begun. The two new visitors acted with energy. Melrose, the largest and the first founded of the Scottish houses, had no fewer than four daughter-houses. The chief trouble was at Melrose and its daughter-houses of Balmerino and Newbattle and concerned monastic poverty and the common life. Each monk had an individual portion and garden and did as he pleased with them: they were in reality private property. The visitors put pressure on Durie; monks of Melrose, Balmerino and Newbattle met together and petitioned the visitors for exemptions; the visitors agreed on a compromise which would remove the worst abuses. In October 1534, they ordered Durie to enforce the modified reforms at once under pain of deposition and summoned him to the chapter of 1535.⁵⁴

At some point James wrote to Cîteaux asking that there should be no changes. Durie did not appear at the 1535 chapter and was summoned a second time, while Malin and Campbell were told to enforce the abbot of Chaalis's enactments, with any modifications they thought necessary.⁵⁵ We know of these being put into effect at one monastery. In February 1537, Abbot Robert Reid of Kinloss in his capacity of Immediate Superior and Walter Malin as commissary of

⁵³ *James V Letters*, 210-11, 238; Canivez, *Statuta*, 1533, nos. 14, 47. Cf. McRoberts, *Essays*, 214-15.

⁵⁴ Morton, *Monastic Annals*, 240-2; J. Campbell, *Balmerino and its Abbey*, 2nd edn. (Edinburgh, 1899), 227-30.

⁵⁵ *James V Letters*, 286; Canivez, *Statuta*, 1535, no. 32.

general chapter visited Deer, where the abbot and community accepted their modified regulations.⁵⁶ The same probably happened in other monasteries but has not been recorded.

There is nothing more about visitors for Scotland in the acts of general chapter, though perhaps the definitors made appointments. The system of filiation continued to operate. With the consent of Reid and Malin, the Deer community in 1542 made some further modifications in the matter of monastic poverty and common life.⁵⁷ Efforts or at least aspirations towards reform continued until 1560. In October 1553, Abbot Campbell and the monks of Coupar Angus agreed to order their life-style as regards money, food and so on according to the "reformers" of the Cistercian order. John Smith, a monk of Kinloss who died in 1557, argued in favour of strict observance in the matter of portions.⁵⁸ Walter Malin is found as commissary of Cîteaux until February 1556 and perhaps 1557, and the archbishop of St Andrews in 1556 protested at the disciplinary action he had taken at Newbattle.⁵⁹

The reforms of monastic life at Kinloss under Thomas Crystal and Robert Reid, described in some detail by Ferrerio, should also be viewed in the context of general Cistercian efforts rather than in isolation.⁶⁰ For the sake of completeness, too, it should be added that two houses of the uncentralised Augustinian canons were affected by a reform movement in France. St Andrews priory founded St Leonard's college in 1512 according to the strict reforming principles of the monastery of Windesheim and the university reformer, Jean Standonck. Its purpose was to produce priests dedicated to study and poverty. In the 1520s and 1530s, Alexander Myln, abbot of Cambuskenneth, sent young canons to study at the abbey of St Victor

⁵⁶ *Aberdeen-Banff Illustrations*, iv, 14-18.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 18-19; *Calendar of the Laing Charters*, ed. J. Anderson (Edinburgh, 1899), nos. 442, 507; Scottish Record Office, RH 6/1238 ff *passim*.

⁵⁸ *Rental Book of the Cistercian Abbey of Coupar Angus* (Grampian Club, 1879-80), ii, 109-10; McRoberts, *Essays*, 215.

⁵⁹ RSS, ii, 2547; *Wigt. Chrs.*, 65n; *Selections from the Records of the Regality of Melrose* (SHS, 1914-17), iii, 150, 187-95.

⁶⁰ McRoberts, *Essays*, 214.

in Paris, which had been affected by the reforms of Windesheim and Standonck, with the aim of introducing reformed Augustinian observance at Cambuskenneth. It is worth pointing out that the connection of Cambuskenneth with the congregation of Arrouaise in northern France, to which it originally belonged, had long since lapsed, and the last general chapter at Arrouaise was held in 1470.⁶¹

By and large, monastic life in Scotland in the decades before 1560 may not have been in a flourishing condition, but acceptance of mediocrity was not universal. And clearly, the efforts towards reform would have been more successful but for the actions of the Scottish crown and, to a lesser extent, of the archbishops of St Andrews and the Beaton hegemony.

⁶¹ M. Dilworth, "Canons Regular and the Reformation", in *The Renaissance in Scotland*, edd. A. MacDonald, M. Lynch and I.B. Cowan (Leiden, 1994); *Dictionnaire d'Histoire et Géographie Ecclésiastiques*, iv, (1930), 728-30.